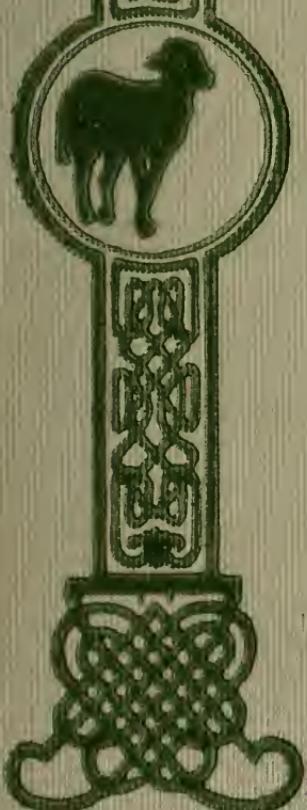


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The Song of our Syrian Guest John



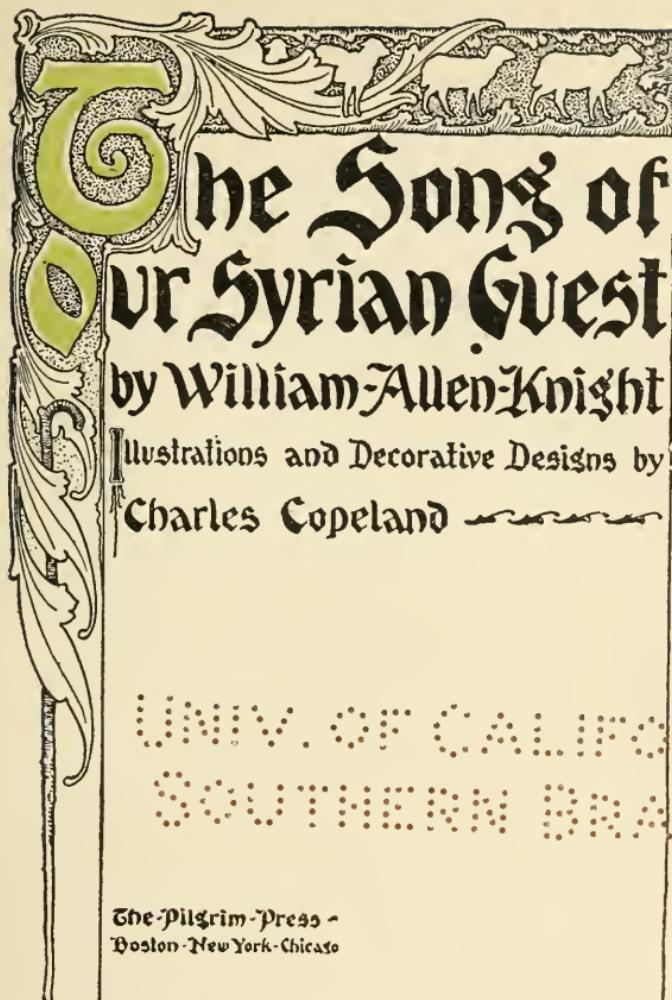
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The Song of Our Syrian Guest

he Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.³ He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. 



Beside the Still Waters



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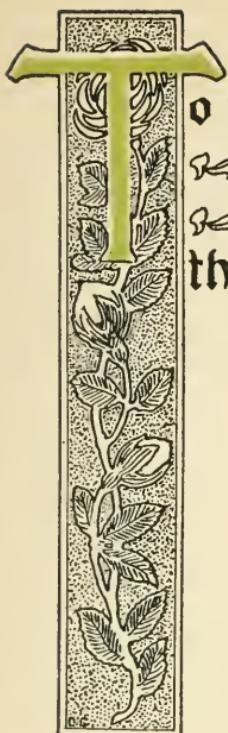
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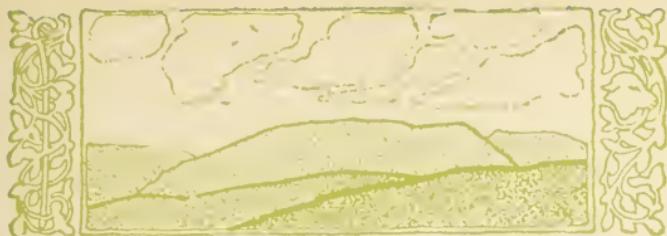


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To the hand that held
the tea-ball
and the faces of
the two little maids

Illustrations

Beside the Still Waters	<i>Frontispiece</i>
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A GODSPEED is fitting as a pilgrim after much journeying fares forth once more; and such is this little book. Of the memories that hover about the pen writing these lines, one only may have place on the page. It is of a day when this word came from a mountain village: "It has shown me the shepherd as a savior and the Savior as a Shepherd." Because some who will look upon these pages are in sick-rooms, some are lonely being companioned only by grief, some are poor, some for the time are misunderstood, some are rich and allured by many voices, some are discouraged and feel that they are little loved, some are young and cannot find their way, and some are old and way-worn — because all have need of the Shepherd's care, go, little Book, once more, bearing this token only.

The Song of Our Syrian Guest



The Song of Our Syrian Guest

FADUEL MOGHABGHAB," said our guest, laughing as he leaned over the tea-table toward two little maids, vainly trying to beguile their willing and sweetly puckered lips into pronouncing his name. "Faduel Moghabghab," he repeated in syllables, pointing to the card he had passed to them. "Accent the u and drop those g's which your little throats cannot manage," he went on kindly, while the merriment sparkled in his lustrous dark

eyes, and his milk-white teeth, seen through his black moustache as he laughed, added beauty to his delicate and vivacious face.

He was a man of winsome mind, this Syrian guest of ours, and the spirituality of his culture was as marked as the refinement of his manners. We shall long remember him for the tales told that evening of his home in Ainzechalta on the slope of the Syrian mountains, but longest of all for what he said out of the memories of his youth about a shepherd song.

“It was out of the shepherd life of my country,” he remarked, “that there came long ago that sweetest religious song ever written — the Twenty-third Psalm.”

After the ripple of his merriment with the children had passed he turned to me with a face now serious and pensive, and said: “Ah, so many

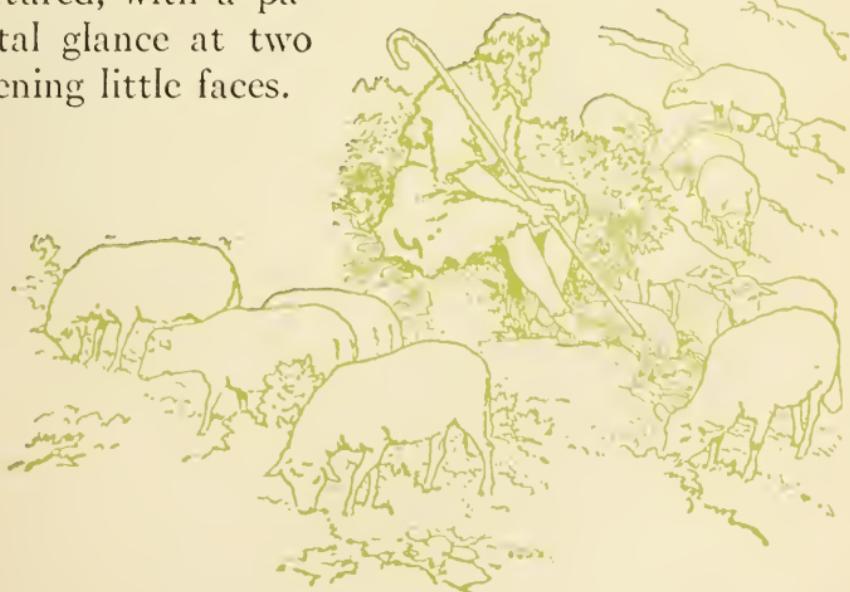
things familiar to us are strange to you of America."

"Yes," I answered, "and no doubt because of this we often make mistakes which are more serious than mispronunciation of your names."

He smiled pleasantly, then with earnestness said: "So many things in the life of my people, the same now as in the days of old, have been woven into the words of the Bible and into the religious ideas expressed there; you of the Western world, not knowing these things as they are, often misunderstand what is written, or at least fail to get a correct impression from it."

"Tell us about some of these," I ventured, with a parental glance at two listening little faces.

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After mentioning several instances, he went on: "And there is the shepherd psalm; I find that it is taken among you as having two parts, the first under the figure of shepherd life, the second turning to the scene of a banquet with the host and the guest."

"Oh, we have talked about that," said my lady of the teacups as she dangled the tea-ball with a connoisseur's fondness, "and we have even said that we wished the wonderful little psalm could have been finished in the one figure of shepherd life."

"It seems to us," I added, wishing to give suitable support to my lady's rather brave declaration of our sense of a literary flaw in the matchless psalm, "it seems to us to lose the sweet, simple melody and to close with strange, heavy chords when it changes to a scene of banquet hospitality. Do

you mean that it actually keeps the shepherd figure to the end?"

"Certainly, good friends."

With keen personal interest I asked him to tell us how we might see it as a shepherd psalm throughout. So we listened, and he talked, over the cooling teacups.

"It is all, all a simple shepherd psalm," he began. "See how it runs through the round of shepherd life from first word to last."

With softly modulated voice that had the rhythm of music and the hush of veneration in it, he quoted: "*THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT.*"

"There is the opening strain of its music; in that chord is sounded the key-note, which is never lost till the plaintive melody dies away at the song's end. All that follows

The Song of Our Syrilian Guest

is that thought put in varying light."

I wish it were possible to reproduce here the light in his face and the interchange of tones in his mellow voice as he went on. He talked of how the varied needs of the sheep and the many-sided care of the shepherd are pictured in the short sentences of the psalm.

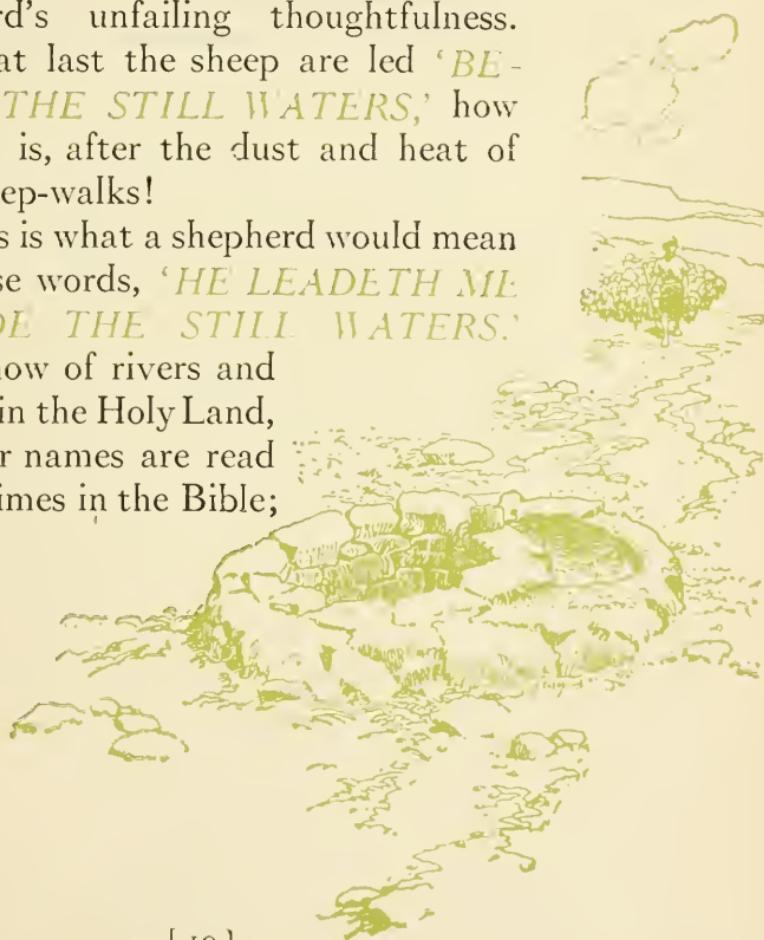
"Each is distinct and adds something too precious to be merged and lost," he said.

"*HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES;*" — nourishment, rest. '*HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS,*' — the scene changes and so does the meaning. You think here of quietly flowing streams; so you get one more picture of rest; but you miss one of the finest scenes in shepherd life and one of the rarest blessings of

the soul that is led of God. All through the day's roaming the shepherd keeps one thing in mind. He must lead his flock to a drinking-place. The refreshment of good water marks the coveted hour of all the day; the spot where it is found amid the rough, waterless hills and plains is the crowning token of the shepherd's unfailing thoughtfulness. When at last the sheep are led '*BE-SIDE THE STILL WATERS*,' how good it is, after the dust and heat of the sheep-walks!

"This is what a shepherd would mean by those words, '*HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS*.' You know of rivers and brooks in the Holy Land, for their names are read many times in the Bible;

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but you do not think how the rivers are far from each other through rough country; and you know not how many of the brooks are called 'wadies' by us because they are only ravines that run dry when the rainy season ends. Job says, 'My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, as the channel of brooks that pass away.' In the region where David was a shepherd living streams are scarce indeed; for Judea borders on the south country called Negeb and that means 'the dry.' Even in other parts where the lasting streams are, how often the shepherd finds them in gullies between broken hills, how often the banks are too dangerous for the sheep and the flow too rough. Sheep are timid and fear a current of water, as they well may, for they are easily carried down stream because of their wool."

“Poor things, how do they ever get a good drink!” exclaimed one of the two little maids, whose heart was always open lovingly to animals.

“The shepherd sees to that, doesn’t he?” said the other timidly, with earnest eyes set on our guest.

His face beamed with winsome relish of these tributes to his success. “Yes, the sheep would indeed have a hard time finding water to drink, were it not that the shepherd sees to that.”

The playfulness faded from his eyes and the shadow of manhood’s years was there as he said to me: “Brother, you and I have learned how much is in that question and answer. How should we get the refreshment we need in the rough world, if the Shepherd did not see to that? But he does, he does!”

His face brightened again as he



The Song of Our Syrian Guest

turned to the four blue eyes across the table.

“Shall I tell you how the shepherd sees to it that the sheep have a good drink every day? Listen.

“There are wells and fountains here and there in the regions where the flocks roam, and in some parts there are cisterns, though the sheep like the living water best. The shepherds know where these drinking-places are all through the country where streams are few. It is a fine sight to see the shepherds bring their flocks ‘*BESIDE THE STILL WATERS*’ at some well or fountain, while the wide, silent country, over which they and many other sheep have wandered, spreads all around them, and the far expanse of the sky arches over them.

“The shepherd makes a certain sound; all his sheep lie

down and are quiet. Then he fills the drinking-troughs. The bubbling of the fountain, or the current, if it be by a stream, is no longer there to trouble the sheep. They can drink now undisturbed. This is the delicate meaning of that word 'still.' As the Hebrew words put it, 'He leadeth beside the waters of quietness.'

"Then the waiting sheep hear a whistle or a call. They never misunderstand; they know their shepherd's voice and never respond to the wrong shepherd if several flocks have come up together. And, strangest of all, the sheep come up by groups; the shepherd makes them understand. So in groups he leads them until they stand '*BESIDE THE STILL WATERS.*' And, oh, how they drink, with the shepherd standing near!"

After a pause, with a far-off look

in his eyes, he said, "It is a beautiful scene, so beautiful that St. John has used it in picturing heaven." A smile broke over his face as he quoted: "'The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life.'"

No one spoke as he sat turning his teacup. A tear started from his down-cast eyes. Presently he seemed to recall himself.

"But I must tell you of one more scene that comes to my memory whenever I read the words, *HE LEADS ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS*." It would make a beautiful picture if some one would paint it.

"Up in the mountainsides of Lebanon, where my kinsmen have long been shepherds, often there are no regular drinking-places, such as the

wells and fountains on the plains. But as the shepherd leads his sheep over the rough slopes, he finds many a spring and sees its rivulet noisily running down a crevice. His sheep need water. They cannot drink from the leaping little stream. What does he do? He finds a suitable turn or nook in its course; he walls it up with a little dam and so holds the water till it forms a quiet pool. Then, right there on the open hills, he leads his sheep '*BESIDE THE STILL WATERS*,' which the shepherd's own hand has stilled. I know of nothing more fit to picture the Shepherd's care of souls that trust him than that scene up there on the mountainside."

While our thoughts were carried away to these scenes of thirsty flocks drinking, I chanced to notice that the tea-ball was again quietly at work.

The Song of Our Syrian Guest

As we sat thinking on that picture up in the mountain, a good hand offered our guest a fresh cup. He received it with a low bow, sipped it in quiet, then with a grateful smile began speaking again.

“*HE RESTORETH MY SOUL.*” You know,” he said, turning to me, “that soul means the life or one’s self in the Hebrew writings.”

Then addressing us all he went on: “There are perilous places for the sheep on all sides, and they seem never to learn to avoid them. The shepherd must ever be on the watch. And there are private fields and sometimes gardens and vineyards here and there in the shepherd country; if a sheep stray into them and be caught there it is forfeited to the owner of the land. So, ‘*HE RESTORETH MY SOUL*’ means, ‘The shepherd brings me back and rescues me from fatal and forbidden places.’”

“‘Restores me when wandering,’ is the way it is put in one of our hymns,” I interposed.

“Ah, sir, that is it exactly,” he answered. “‘Restores me when wandering!’

“*HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE.*” Often have I roamed through the shepherd country in my youth and seen how hard it is to choose the right path for the sheep; one leads to a precipice, another to a place where the sheep cannot find the way back; and the shepherd was always going ahead, ‘leading’ them in the right paths, proud of his good name as a shepherd.

“Some paths that are right paths still lead through places that have deadly perils. ‘*YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH,*’ is

the way the psalm touches this fact in shepherd life. This way of naming the valley is very true to our country. I remember one near my home called 'the valley of robbers,' and another, 'the ravine of the raven.' You see 'the valley of the shadow of death' is a name drawn from my country's old custom.

"FOR THOU ART WITH ME."

Ah, how could more be put into few words! With the sheep, it matters not what the surroundings are, nor how great the perils and hardships; if only the shepherd is with them, they are content. There is no finer picture of the way of peace for the troubled in all the world.

"To show how much the presence of the shepherd counts for the welfare of the sheep I can think of nothing better than the strange thing I now tell you. It is quite beyond the usual,



The Valley of the Shadow of Death

daily care on which the flock depends so fondly. But I have seen it more than once.

“Sometimes, in spite of all the care of the shepherd and his dogs, a wolf will get into the very midst of the flock. The sheep are wild with fright. They run and leap and make it impossible to get at the foe in their midst, who at that very moment may be fastening his fangs in the throat of a helpless member of the flock. But the shepherd is with them. He knows what to do even at such a time. He leaps to a rock or hillock that he may be seen and heard. Then he lifts his voice in a long call, something like a wolf’s cry: ‘Ooh! ooh!’

“On hearing this the sheep remember the shepherd; they heed his voice; and, strange to tell, the poor, timid creatures, which were helpless with



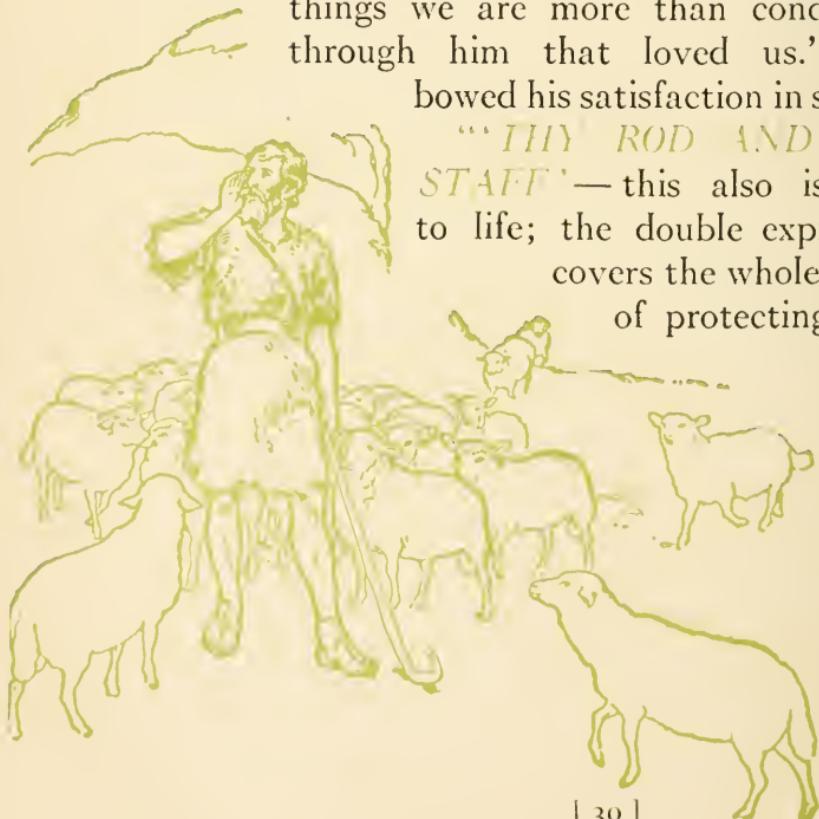
The Song of Ovr- Syrian Guest

terror before, instantly rush with all their strength into a solid mass. The pressure is irresistible; the wolf is overcome; frequently he is crushed to death, while the shepherd stands there on a rock crying, 'Ooh! ooh!' *'I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME.'*

He paused, looking questioningly at one and another.

"Yes," I said at last, "'in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.'" He bowed his satisfaction in silence.

"THY ROD AND THY STAFF"—this also is true to life; the double expression covers the whole round of protecting care.



For the shepherds carry a crook for guiding the sheep and a weapon suitable for defending them, the staff and the rod; one for aiding them in places of need along peaceful ways, the other for defense in perils of robbers and wild beasts. This saying describes as only a shepherd could how much those words mean, *THOU ART WITH ME*’

“And what shall I say of the next words, ‘*THEY COMFORT ME*’? Ah, madam, you should see the sheep cuddle near the shepherd to understand that! The shepherd’s call, ‘Ta-a-a-a, ho-o-o,’ and the answering patter of feet as the sheep hurry to him are fit sounds to be chosen out of the noisy world to show what comfort God gives to souls that heed his voice; and those sounds have been heard in my country this day as they were the day this shepherd psalm was written! ”

The Song of Our Syrilian Guest

He sat in silence a moment musing as if the sounds were in his ear.

With quiet animation he lifted his thin hand and continued: "Now here is where you drop the shepherd figure and put in a banquet and so lose the fine climax of completeness in the shepherd's care."

It need not be said that we were eager listeners now, for our guest was all aglow with memories of his far-off homeland and we felt that we were about to see new rays of light flash from this rarest gem in the song-treasury of the world.

"THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES." In the same hushed voice in which he quoted these words he added: "Ah, to think that the shepherd's highest skill and heroism should be lost from view as the psalm

begins to sing of it, and only an indoor banquet thought of!" Again he sat a little time in quiet. Then he said:

"The word for table here used simply means something 'spread out.' One of the psalms quotes the saying, 'Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?' In olden times the table in our country was often just what you see to this day among the Arabs, only a piece of skin or a mat or a cloth spread on the ground. That shows what is meant when the psalmist says, 'Let their table become a snare; and when they are at peace let it become a trap.' Do you not see? He was thinking of this way of having meals on the ground in the open country, and wished that his enemies might be caught off guard while eating and entangled among the things that were spread before them. This is the kind of

table that would be thought of in shepherd life. Why not so in a shepherd song?

“Now is not that exactly like what the shepherd prepares for his sheep? Along with finding water he has the daily task of searching out a good and safe feeding-place. He ‘prepares a table before them’ in truth, and it is none the less a table in his eyes because it is a spreading slope of grassy ground.

“All the shepherd’s skill and often heroic work are called forth in this duty, for it is done many a day ‘in the presence of the sheep’s enemies.’ There are many poisonous plants in the grass and the shepherd must find and avoid them. The sheep will not eat many poisonous things, but there are some which they will eat, one kind of poisonous grass in particular. A cousin of mine once lost three hundred

sheep by a mistake in this hard task.

“Then there are snake holes in some kinds of ground, and, if the snakes be not driven away, they bite the noses of the sheep. For this the shepherd sometimes burns the fat of hogs along the ground. Sometimes he finds ground where moles have worked their holes just under the surface. Snakes lie in these holes with their heads sticking up ready to bite the grazing sheep. The shepherd knows how to drive them away as he goes along ahead of the sheep.

“And around the feeding-ground which the shepherd thus prepares, in holes and caves in the hillsides, there may be jackals, wolves, hyenas, and panthers, too, and the bravery and skill of the shepherd are at the highest point in closing up these dens with stones or slaying the wild beasts with

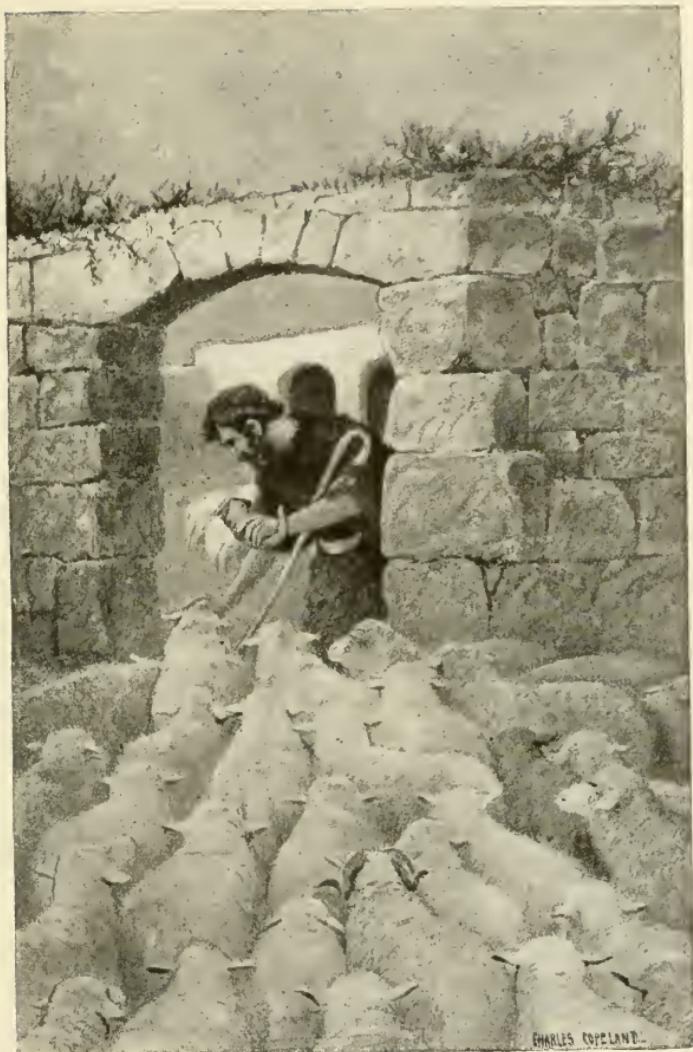
The Song of Our Syrian Guest

his long-bladed knife. Of nothing do you hear shepherds boasting more proudly than of their achievements in this part of their care of flocks.

“And now,” exclaimed our guest with a beaming countenance and suppressed feeling, as if pleading for recognition of the lone shepherd’s bravest act of devotion to his sheep, “and now do you not see the shepherd meaning in that quaint line, ‘*THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES?*’”

“Yes,” I answered; “and I see that God’s care of a man out in the world means far more for his good than seating him at an indoor banquet-table!

“But what about anointing the head with oil and the cup running over? Go on, my friend.”



The Rodding of the Sheep

“Oh, there begins the beautiful picture at the end of the day. The psalm has sung of the whole round of the day’s wandering, all the needs of the sheep, all the care of the shepherd. Now it closes with the last scene of the day. At the door of the sheepfold the shepherd stands and ‘the rodding of the sheep’ takes place. The shepherd turns his body to let the sheep pass; he is the door, as Christ said of himself. With his rod he holds back the sheep while he looks them over one by one as they go into the fold. He has the horn filled with olive-oil and he has cedar-tar, and he anoints a knee bruised on the rocks or a side scratched by thorns. And here comes one that is not bruised but is simply worn and exhausted; he bathes its face and head with the refreshing olive-oil and he takes the large two-handled cup and

The Song of Our Syrian Guest

dips it brimming full from the water he has brought for that purpose, and he lets the weary sheep drink.

“There is nothing finer in the psalm than this. God’s care is not for the wounded only, it is for those who are just worn and weary. *‘THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP RUNNETH OVER.’*

“And then, when the day is done and the sheep are snug within the fold, what contentment, what rest under the starry sky! Then comes the thought of deepest repose and comfort: *‘SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE,’* as they have through all the wandering of the day now ended.

“As the song dies away the heart that God has watched and tended breathes this thought of peace before

the roaming of the day is forgotten in sleep: 'I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOR EVER.' The song is hushed, and the sheep are at rest, safe in the good shepherd's fold."

Do you wonder that ever since that night we have called this psalm The Song of Our Syrian Guest?

Author's Notes



Author's Notes

“Ainzebalta on the slope of the Syrian mountains.” — PAGE 14.

When the little train has crawled up the rack and pinion railway which zigzags from Beyrout and its expanse of sea over the snow-topped Lebanons toward Damascus, one of the small stations at which it halts among the heights is Ain Sofar. The traveler will there notice a carriage road running southward. That road would soon lead to a spot where a flat-roofed village some ten miles from Ain Sofar could be seen across a mountain valley. That is Ainzebalta. An excellent water-color drawing of this village, with the best description of scenery and life thereabout known to me, may be found in the first ten chapters of Inchbold's *Under The Syrian Sun*.

"You of the Western world, not knowing these things as they are, often misunderstand what is written." — PAGE 15.

One of many misconceptions of this sort may serve to illustrate. Only a western viewpoint could have made the words "laid him in a manger" lead Christendom into its long thought of a stable as Christ's birthplace. In Palestine one sees, as I have sought to show in *No Room in the Inn*, that a lowly home rather than a stable is indicated — an understanding which does not do violence to age-long customs of the land, and also is far happier in its suggestion. Since that little book was published I have had the satisfaction of hitting upon the following: "It is my impression that the birth [of Jesus] actually took place in an ordinary house of some common peasant, and that the babe was laid in one of the mangers such as are still found in the dwellings of farmers in this region." (Thomson's *The Land and the Book*, v. 2, p. 503.) On page 98 of the same volume this author tells how his own children were once thus accommodated.

*“There is the shepherd psalm; I find
that this is taken among you as
having two parts,” etc.—PAGE 16.*

The Song
of Ovr-
Syrian Guest

Even reading men are often unaware that authoritative writers have seen a shepherd unity throughout this psalm for centuries. The great eye of Augustine, fifteen hundred years ago, saw an essential, onward movement which carries the shepherd thought on to the table prepared in the presence of enemies—a spiritual deepening in that the shepherd’s goodness widens with the need, providing care not alone in pleasant places but also where the way becomes hard and perilous. Here are his words: “Now after the rod by which I was brought up while a little one and having life among the flock in the pastures, after that rod when I began to be under the staff, thou hast prepared a table in my sight that I should not now be fed with milk as a little one, but should take food as a larger one, having been established against them that trouble me.” This view can be traced in eminent writings (see notes below) down to our own time. No less a modern scholar than George Adam Smith (*Four Psalms*, 1896) says that “the last two



The Song of Our Sheepish Guest

verses are as pastoral as the first four," and shows that the psalm does not leave the shepherd figure at the table verse.

"See how it runs through the round of shepherd life from first word to last." — PAGE 17.

In *The Expositor* (London, 1899), Armstrong Black published an elaborate article on the shepherd unity of this psalm which is the most comprehensive treatment of the subject I know. The following, somewhat condensed, will surely be welcomed here:

"The shepherd is as plain in the midst and last of this psalm as in the first of it, the same shepherd brave and wise and good in paths of fear, as he who sauntered with his flock beside the still waters. His sheep huddle round him, as he leads through the gloomy ravine. And what would he, there in a place so haunted of wolf and bear? Beyond that valley is the place he seeks. There, encircled by the rocks where prowl the foes of the flock, is the fair spot — nature's own

table spread with food convenient; the odorous trees, shedding their gum, are there to refresh and alleviate; and there is the unceasing well spilling its gift of waters. And the contentment and peace of the flock seem to say: 'Thou spreadest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.' Thus the whole psalm is purely pastoral, a musical parable of a good shepherd and his sheep."

"In the region where David was a shepherd living streams are scarce indeed." — PAGE 20.

Mr. John Whiting, whose home has been in Jerusalem from boyhood and whose scholarly observations are known at Harvard and elsewhere in America, rode with me one day to Ain Fara, two hours of rough riding northeast from the city, to show me what he deems the only spot in Judea which supplies the natural setting for the imagery of this psalm. It is a copious and perennial spring whose stream

runs deep down in the greenness at the bottom of a rocky gorge, the sides of which are steep, perilous, filled with caves, and still the resort of flocks. "Here," said he, "David must have come." His reasoning, based on the fewness of perennial streams in all the country round about, was convincing. Bethlehem lies but a few miles to the south with no all-year waters near it save a well or two. To repeat this psalm in the Ain Fara ravine, with these facts in mind, with goats and sheep seen at the openings of caves or nibbling high on the precipices, with a wolf or fox spied as it ran along the wild heights, with a shepherd discerned among the rocks by the sound of his singing or calling to his flock or blowing on his reed-pipe — this was to feel that I stood at last where the twenty-third psalm first woke its music in a human breast.

"They know their shepherd's voice." — PAGE 23.

A bare-legged young shepherd, wearing a skin bag in which he carried some bread and a

sling, gave me an example of this near the village of Anata, north-east of Jerusalem. "Er-r-r-ruh!" he called, "Direh!" The scattered sheep and goats looked up at this throat-rattle, and a nanny goat, mottled as the name "Direh" implies, came running to eat from his hand. I called names which he gave us, sounding the "Er-r-r-ruh," too. Not one so much as lifted a head. Then the shepherd laughed, and shouted "Abeideh," which means black one. Straightway a black sheep came to him from among the rocks. "Hanoon," he cried, and a gentle creature, one easy to milk, as the name indicates, hurried to receive his caress. "Katmeh," he called sharply. Now that name means short-eared. Here came such a one, and no mistake as to its being Katmeh! "He calleth his own sheep by name," and, "they know not the voice of strangers." Then the shepherd lad cried: "Ta-a-a-a, ho-o-o-o," and the whole flock came pattering to him, and once more, "He goeth before them, and the sheep follow him," was true on the Judean hills.

“He walls it up with a little dam
and so holds the water till it
forms a quiet pool.” — PAGE 25.

I saw a shepherd do this near Zebedani in the Anti-Lebanons. He thus turned water from a swift stream into a grassy hollow, and the sheep stood in the shallow pool drinking with content.

“‘Restores me when wandering’ is the way it is put in one of our hymns.” — PAGE 27.

This is from Montgomery’s hymn, the first stanza of which runs:

“The Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know,
I feed in green pastures, safe-folded I rest;
He leadeth my soul where the still waters flow,
Restores me when wandering, redeems when oppressed.”

“This way of naming the valley is true to our country.” — PAGE 28.

The Song of Our Syrian Guest

Everywhere in Palestine and Syria this way of designating hills and valleys by a descriptive or commemorative phrase is found. In Psalm 84:6 is a similar designation — “Passing through the valley of Baca,” the Revised version rendering this, “the valley of weeping,” and in the margin, “or balsam trees.” The ravine behind Magdala on Lake Galilee is still called “the valley of doves,” for a reason which dates back to the Saviour’s day, as the reader will find in my little book *Peter in the Firelight*. The contemplative old east garners impressions and memories and traditions in this way as by many other customs.

“Shepherds carry a crook for guiding the sheep and a weapon suitable for defending them, the staff and the rod.” — PAGE 31.

One mid-afternoon, near Sarghara, 4600 feet above sea level in the Anti-Lebanons, I saw

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two shepherds with black goats and sheep, one having a long staff crooked at the end, the other a knotted club. Near me as this note is written is a heavy-ended, stout stick, which I brought home from the hands of a shepherd whom I met one evening on the hill-side along the west shore of Lake Galilee. When I pointed to animal hair clotted on the knot, he explained by sign language how he had used it on some wild creature, meanwhile quieting with his caress the staccato bleating of two stray lambs now snug in his bosom. Sometimes this weapon is studded with nails. Beside me also is a stick bent at the end, the use of which was shown me by the young shepherd near Anata before mentioned. He motioned as if hooking a leg and drawing the sheep. The staff is sometimes straight — a climbing stick, as common among shepherds as the goad among plowmen; often it is merely a short sapling so cut as to get the bend of the root, for fuller growth is scarce indeed now in Palestine. But near Bethlehem I saw an old shepherd carrying a long, well-rounded crook, such as has been made familiar in Christian art. The double significance, indi-

cated in the psalm by the plural, "they comfort me," is too precious to be lost sight of. In *Ivanhoe* (chapter 36) there is an interesting instance of the double significance, when the Knight Templar, returned from Palestine, speaks of one as needing "rather the support of the staff than the strokes of the rod."

"The word for table here used simply means something spread out." — PAGE 33.

Gesenius in his Hebrew Lexicon so defined it, and referred to this verse of our psalm together with Psalm 78:19, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"

"This is the kind of table that would be thought of in shepherd life. Why not so in a shepherd song?" — PAGES 33-4.

In *The Spectator*, under date of Saturday, July 26, 1712, in the paper numbered 441,

The Song of Our Syrup Guest

Joseph Addison wrote of the benefits of trusting reliance on God. He closes with a translation of the twenty-third psalm, "which is a kind of *Pastoral* Hymn and filled with those Allusions which are usual in that kind of writing." It begins:

"The Lord my Pasture shall prepare,
And feed me with a shepherd's care."

At the table verse, the rendering is:

"Though in a bare and rugged way,
Through devious lonely wilds I stray,
Thy Bounty shall my Pains beguile;
The barren wilderness shall smile,
With sudden Greens and Herbage crown'd,
And streams shall murmur all around."

Clearly Addison thought of the table spread in the wilderness as the feeding place of the sheep — "sudden Greens and Herbage." In John Byrom's *A Divine Pastoral*, some fifty years later, a similar view is found.

*“He has the horn filled with olive-oil
and he has cedar-tar,” etc.* — PAGE 37.

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In a letter headed “S.S. Strathcona — At sea off the Labrador Coast — Thick Fog,” Dr. W. T. Grenfell once wrote that this passage specially pleased him, and added words about his joys as a physician. A London antiquarian wrote that he had verified all points in the narrative but this, and asked what authentication I could send him. Passing over all book references, let me record here only the following. One day as we journeyed in the Syrian mountains near Ainzehalta I asked our dragoman about the various uses of olive oil among his people. Judge of my delight as these words from his lips were written in my note book: “It is a great medicine with us, also. You know when our Lord Jesus Christ gave that parable he said: ‘Pouring in oil and wine’ — wine for cleansing, oil for healing.”

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“Safe in the good shepherd’s fold.”

— PAGE 39.

Is there scholarly warrant for carrying the shepherd thought of a fold on to the “house” at the close of the psalm? When Addison wrote his delightful stanzas there were at least two great folio works by eminent scholars to support his rendering, both published shortly before his birth in 1672. One was written by Hugo Grotius, the other by Henry Hammond of Oxford. The latter ends his paraphrase thus: “To crown all this, thou shalt enfold me at last in that best of sheep-coats, that place of equal purity and safety, where no ravenous beast can come; there shall I rest, and there abide forever.” In a small, leather-bound book bearing the date 1843, which I have long treasured, are stanzas beginning:

“My shepherd’s name is Love.”

They were written by Edwin F. Hatfield, long eminent in America. The last stanza runs:

“When raging foes surround,
My comforts still abound;
I breathe a fragrant air,
And feed on sweetest fare;

Thus in thy fold,
When worn and old,
I'll dwell secure beneath thy care."



THE GAIN FROM THIS VIEW

The vital gain from this story's interpretation seems to me twofold and really precious. First, the idea of glorying over enemies who have to gaze impotently on the honors paid a favorite at a banquet must be a harsh note utterly discordant in a song so sweet — the one human flaw in a gem divinely pure. To keep the shepherd imagery secures for the psalm itself a literary simplicity and a quiet heightening of effect within that simplicity quite too fine to lose; and it saves us from blurring its picture of spiritual serenity at the point of deepest beauty.

But for men in their troubled world-life, it does far more than to secure the highest literary charm. It distinctly sounds the notes of peace where men often cease to hear them. It gathers up the music and the message of the psalm, as it were, into a deep harmony. In the first three verses there are food, refreshment, rest, guidance. Yet there, all is in

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pleasant places; it is a simple melody. But at the words, "Yea, though," a second movement opens, deeper, fuller. Not a melody, but a harmony swells through the last three verses. Here once more is guidance, but now it is through a dark valley where perils are, and protection is its consummation; here is food, but now it is in the wilds where enemies prowl and lurk with savage eyes; here is refreshment, but now it is with alleviating oil and ministering cup amid hard places; and here, too, is rest, but now it finds completeness in the shepherd's shelter after the long day's roaming. Nothing that is in the forepart of the psalm is lacking even when the pleasant places are left behind and hardships and perils abound.

This is the full glory of what the good shepherd is to his sheep. He rises to the situation, measures up to all emergencies of need. Herein is the height of his goodness. It goes beyond all that he could be to them in the pleasant, easy days.

When at last the psalm sings: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," that word *all* is the high, full-toned

note sounding out the meaning of the whole psalm. "All the days"—days when pastures were green and waters still; days when we went through dark places in shadow and peril; days when we were far out in the world, in life's imperative quest, enduring hardship and beset by enemies—"all the days of my life." This psalm is the divine "Lo! I am with you alway—through all the days," sounding back from the heart of man.

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